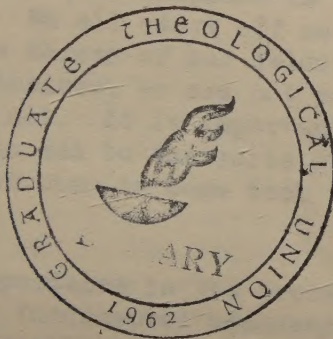


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## Editorial.

'All men know suffering, which is as the mud wherein the lotus takes root. Few men know how to nourish the seed of True Religion within themselves in the mud of ignorance that surrounds them'.

It is said in Zen that we study the self in order to forget the self, in forgetting the self we are enlightened. In practice we tend to be afraid of self-knowledge, we are afraid of what we will find. We have been wearing blinkers for years shutting the world out through a screen of delusive thinking. We may come to training when chinks are beginning to appear in the armour of our self-image or when some of our key attachments no longer hold for some reason. This gives us an opportunity to see into the transience of all things and search for something deeper. In any case it is always our true nature trying to manifest itself and we are more or less conscious of the process, usually less conscious at the beginning. In Soto Zen it is important to see that the teaching is that we are originally enlightened but we do not realise it. The path is sometimes represented as a black elephant becoming white (the elephant is the symbol of the saint in Buddhism.) We all start off as black elephants, the black is the screen of our delusive thinking, but we are elephants nevertheless, we are not setting out to become something we are not. It is important to realise the least we use training to add to the suits of armour which we already have rather than to come back to our fundamental selves.

Honesty is of great importance in the process of training as is faith in our fundamental adequacy and the adequacy of others. If we really try to look inwards and stop being carried away by externals then we will see more of what our true nature is and we will be able to deal with our shortcomings and with the problems which arise in life in a more adequate fashion. In this it does not matter if we start off as ultra-deluded, slightly deluded or just plain deluded, what counts is that we are prepared to change, there are no privileged persons in this. Sometimes if we are not aware of the adequacy of our nature then there will



be a key problem area in our life where we will have difficulty. This is no obstacle if we are prepared to do something about it. Recently someone asked at a retreat about Bashumitsu, the Seventh Ancestor. Bashumitsu was a drunkard before he met Mishaka, the Sixth Ancestor.

'Before he went to Mishaka, Bashumitsu always had a vessel of wine with him and never threw it away. He thought it most excellent. He wanted it in the morning as well as in the evening, using it freely. Indeed his very life was the vessel.'

Bashumitsu put the vessel down, he was prepared to drop his one-sided attachment, which is easier said than done; an interesting character, apparent weakness masking great inner strength. Just as Bashumitsu's energies were locked up in drunkenness so are our energies locked up in our petty attachments and we must be prepared to drop them if we are to develop spiritually. Sometimes this will feel as if our very life-line is being cut, this is because we are not yet in touch with our real life, what we imagine to be life is an umbilical cord binding us to the womb, we have not yet faced up to the fact that we have been born.

Zen offers no easy answers, our training is to come back to facing whatever is in front of us now. Often this is to come face to face with our own ignorance, the blocks we have developed in order to withstand reality, whether we have withdrawn into our shells or become so over-involved in the parts we play in life that we have forgotten they are parts. Of course, there will always be parts to play in life, the important thing is that we play the parts not that the parts play us. Self-knowledge is sometimes a painful process, but is worthwhile and necessary if we are to stop spreading a karma of death in the world. It is said in Buddhism that sometimes the self is infinite and sometimes the self of others is infinite. You will love what you find but you may not like it, because the Truth is disturbing, it calls us on to realise more and we do not always want to

Jitsuyu Evans.

## The Four Noble Truths.

Shakyamuni Buddha in one of his first sermons 2,500 years ago at the Deer Park in Benares outlined what has become one of the very basic parts of Buddhism; the Four Noble Truths which are that suffering is seemingly an inescapable part of life, that this suffering is caused by ignorance of our real situation and our perpetual clinging to ourselves as we think we are and to the world around us. The Buddha declared in the Third Truth that it is possible for everyone to get beyond suffering, that we can lay aside our small selves and find something infinitely greater that lies beyond our egocentric life. The way to this end is the eightfold path of acquiring right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation, a process that in Zen we call training.

The process of training is the process of finding our way back into touch with our true nature and then fulfilling our function in the world in accordance with the true desire of our hearts.

Often the starting point for many people in training is a gradual realisation of the apparent meaninglessness and emptiness of the world. Life can appear as a futile humdrum crawl down a drainpipe into which we are born and condemned to crawl until we die, an exercise in which all the pain and suffering seems to be a meaningless, hopeless sentence passed on us by an unfeeling, heathen universe. What a waste!

We all at times have an inkling of the underlying futility which rises up and haunts us driving us to some sort of distraction or other to take the edge off this small perception of the painful reality. Life lived like this becomes 'the drifting wandering world' in which we let ourselves be driven about by whatever current comes along and then at the end of life to look back and see that we have lived an existence without purpose or meaning, unfulfilled, rather useless, silly. Why bother? It is all too much effort for nothing.



So there we are in this situation where nothing has any value, even our own lives. What to do? Commit suicide physically or mentally, by deadening our minds in one way or another so that we don't see any more?

It is the recognition of this situation that is the starting point of Buddhism, the first of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths, that of suffering, that sour quality that can seem to underlie our lives waiting for us to fall into it and give up hope that there is any way out.

What causes this situation? Is it in fact a heartless universe that conspires against us? I don't think so, this situation has a much more obvious culprit - us. Our approach to life conditions how we see it, if we have a humdrum approach just letting things move us as they will ..... growing up.....going to school.....getting a job.. getting married..... retiring and then dying all nice and orderly, then what chance have we of ever really finding out what the meaning of our existence is - not some intellectual idea but a certain feeling that life is tremendously worthwhile of great dynamic purpose and then living this out?

If we begin to see a little of what we are without shying away but begin little by little to accept it then that perception of the actuality of our state can act as a great spur to finding the way out. Once we allow ourselves to be cognizant of what we really are then we either have to pretend that we did not see or else go on and do something about the situation. To do something about the state our lives are in is to see more and more of what we actually are and in so doing we discover that we are in fact responsible for the situation and so with a great effort accept the responsibility for our lives and realize that as we made the mess we can rectify it.

Our lives are empty because we have dulled our existence rather than face reality. Facing reality means that we have to let go of all our security, all our friends, relatives, everything, because we have built up a world of fake relationships, fake security, so that if we wish to see the reality of life we have to let go of all these things so that we can discover a real relationship with those around us based on reality.

not on our own world of delusion.

It is this clinging to ourselves as we think we are, the clinging to our security, to our delusions that perpetuates this whole situation. Shakyamuni's Second Noble Truth is that the cause of all this suffering is this very clinging process.... if we can let go of ourselves then nothing offends us, nothing stands in the way of our training.

Having stated the problem and identified the cause, Shakyamuni in the Third Noble Truth affirms that there is something beyond our petty egos, that we can go beyond the whole problem of suffering and find Nirvana. We can find a much deeper, more fulfilling way to live without souring our lives and the world, we can find it if we want it enough. We need the faith that Nirvana exists, that we can find it so that we can shake off our doubts and reservations and plunge wholeheartedly into training.

How we find it is the process of training - the process of looking deeply into ourselves constantly and always being prepared to choose a positive approach to life, being prepared to change in all things. Not easy, as training demands from us everything that we are afraid to give.

But if we find within us the commitment (and it is there to be found) then we can turn the whole mess of our lives into something positive, something that all the time points out to us where we are going wrong. All the suffering and pain that comes along teaches more and more about ourselves directly so that if we are open we can see the whole process for what it is and stop investing our lives in such a stupid hurting way and instead training becomes our whole purpose in life and then we find that training has a meaning of its own, a fulfillment in itself that begins to give life back its vitality. We grow more and more alive as we let our egos wither. The Universe then seems a very compassionate place that is in a most direct way helping us along for we are no longer going 'our way'.

Shakyamuni Buddha's Fourth Noble Truth is this way to find fulfilment and to escape from suffering, that there is nothing wrong when we train.

Daishin Morgan.



Zen Master Dogen said 'Whilst we adore flowers they wither, weeds grow strong whilst we long for their destruction'. This is things just as they are, we know this from our daily lives if we have a garden. We go out there and the flowers are beautiful one day and faded away the next, whilst every time we pull weeds up a thousand more seem to spring into their place of a night. Just is it so with training, we adore the beauty of life and long for the destruction of its ugliness and hateful side. This is only natural, but if we completely give into this we do not live with the way things really are. First, we must learn to accept that it is in the nature of things that beauty will not always be with us and the seeds of ugliness are forever sprouting.

If we are to follow the Buddhist Way we must learn not to become distracted by the flowers or the weeds of our life, not to become obsessed by the beauty or completely revulsed by the ugliness. We must learn that they are part of life and accept them. There will always be good and bad for us. But in Buddhism we are searching diligently for the Truth. If on our journey we come across beautiful flowers then, without being sidetracked, we may admire them. If on our journey we come across weeds, then we can uproot them, but the point of the journey is not the mere cultivation of our good side and the destruction of our bad side, but the Truth. It is true that, if we are going to find the Truth we will have to cultivate the garden of our life, but in this we must strike a balance, yes we must weed and yes we must cultivate the useful side, but this is a means to an end, and when we let the processes of the cultivation become obsessive we have just grown ourselves a new weed.

The problem for most people in daily life is practice how can we keep ourselves at our training moment by moment. Early on, we try this and that but it does not work. Sooner or later we come face to face with the fact that the highest form of training is the training of will and this must be constant and unremitting refining, putting ourselves back in the furnace to melt out the dross. Here this saying of Dogen concerning flowers and weeds becomes doubly important, be-



ment's absence from training and one has a field of  
ids again.

There is also another way of looking at this. Let  
look at our lives and see one of the things that is  
y commonly done by many people and yet causes them  
less distress. If you plant a seed and then water it  
then carefully fertilise it and pull out any weeds  
it grow then it will grow strong, but how often havn't  
planted a seed of hate or jealousy, petty-mindedness  
laziness and then watered it carefully and pulled out  
weeds of love or open-heartedness or energy that have  
own. Of course, if we do this then our original seed of  
e etc. will prosper greatly and soon it will flower and  
n seed and then we will have a field full of hate. If  
the other hand we diligently cultivate our better qualities,  
lling up and putting on the compost heap of our life the  
ids that grow, then of course our lives will have a  
pletely different quality. This, of course, is fine,  
it does not go to the heart of the matter, we must  
d that for ourselves. Until we do we will not be able  
truly judge the difference between weeds and flowers.  
must diligently search for the Truth wherever we are  
in whatever circumstances we may be. Before we have  
nd it, there is no excuse for idleness or dilatoriness,  
must search diligently with all our strength in the  
s handed down by the Buddhas and the Patriarchs, for  
y have been where we have now and we can be as they.

Daiji Strathern.

### News and Events.

hives:- Our thanks to Joe Heavenstone for the donation of a  
hive. We also received a large donation towards beekeeping  
equipment and now have three hives.

thanks to the British Oxygen Company who gave us a  
cylinder which has been converted into a gong.

mushrooms:- We are growing our own mushrooms in compost  
en to us by a local stable.

visits:- We have had a number of visits from the Mining Inspector.  
cannot mine without a Deputy and are employing as Deputy  
local miner who has mined within a fifteen mile radius all his  
life.

stair rail:- We have erected a new stair rail as somebody  
recently fell off the stairs and injured herself.

Retreats:-We will be holding sesshin (week-long) on the following dates:- May 29-June 6, July 31-Aug.8, Aug.28-Sept.5 and week-end retreats July 3-4, Aug.14-15. Booking to the Guestmaster enclosing a stamped addressed envelope. There will also be a sesshin at Spode House, Hawksyard Priory, Rugeley, Staffordshire. (Phone Armitage 490112) between 16th. and 23rd. July. This is an inter-religious retreat. Applications should be made to the Warden, the cost will be £23 for shared accomodation and £28 for a single room.



## Throssel Hole Priory Journal.

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Throssel Hole Priory,  
Carr Shield,  
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Northumberland NE47 8AL.

The Prior and the Editor are not responsible for the individual opinions of writers contributing to the Journal.

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### Selling Water By The River.

The Priory is selling copies of Kennett Roshi's book "Selling Water By The River, A Manual of Zen Training." The book includes Kennett Roshi's explanation of Zen meditation, training and koans, as well as translations from Dogen and Hakuin, the two great founders of Soto Zen in Japan. Also included are the scriptures and ceremonial of Soto Zen, much of which is used here at the Priory.

Price including postage and packing for the hardback edition is £2.50. The paperback edition is now out of print.

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### Retreats.

Week-end retreats:- April 3-4  
May 1-2  
July 3-4

Week Sesshin:- May 29-June 6  
July 31-Aug.8  
Aug.28-Sept.5.

